

in these discussions could write it out on the back of an envelope.

Perhaps that is part of the challenge here. I know the Republican approach to Medicare is much different than the Democratic approach. The House Republican budget would have dramatically changed Medicare as we know it. It would have doubled the out-of-pocket expenditures of senior citizens. It would have put the Medicare Program in the hands of private health insurance companies. Unfortunately, it would have put many seniors in their sixties, seventies, and eighties at the tender mercies of health insurance adjusters. That is not a good approach to health care for our seniors.

The challenges we face are not easy, they are not cosmetic, and they can't be solved by letting the market—meaning insurance companies—run Medicare.

In these negotiations, I believe many Democrats, myself included, are willing to sit down and talk about reductions in government spending. Even though I believe in my heart of hearts our economy needs a stimulus at this point and reducing spending may be exactly the wrong thing to do, I am still prepared to sit at the table and find a consensus if we can when it comes to spending cuts.

But we shouldn't make this economic challenge be subject to dramatically changing the benefits under Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid. These programs are critical for families across America. Some of them have watched their savings disappear, their pension plans evaporate in a bankruptcy court, and they count on Social Security. We have to be there to make sure Social Security will be there for them.

Senator MCCONNELL also wants the Senate and the American people to think Republicans are negotiating in good faith and the Democrats are not. He said:

We showed a willingness to sacrifice all along even as we made it crystal clear from the outset that tax increases would not be a part of the agreement.

So I have to ask Senator MCCONNELL: What is it the Republicans are willing to sacrifice in this debate? He went on to say:

There can be no question by anyone involved in these discussions that Republicans are willing to make tough choices.

Again, which tough choices? Right now we are at a stalemate in our conversations with the President because the Republicans have been unable to come up with an approach that will meet the needs of deficit reduction.

So we need to work together. Both sides need to be willing to make these tough choices and face these challenges. Unless and until we do this on a bipartisan basis, we will not be serving the people who elected us.

It struck me as I sat in that room the other night—the Cabinet Room with the President—what a rare honor it is for me and for every one of us in that

room to be there, to be entrusted with this responsibility for this great Nation of over 300 million people who are counting on us to do something historic and maybe politically bold. I am prepared to do that. I hope others are as well. I think if we approach it on a bipartisan basis, with both sides willing to give, with everything on the table, we can solve this, and we should do it as quickly as possible.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### SHARED SACRIFICE IN RESOLVING THE BUDGET DEFICIT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1323, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1323) to express the sense of the Senate on shared sacrifice and in resolving the budget deficit.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 529, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 530 (to amendment No. 529), of a perfecting nature.

Reid motion to commit the bill to the Committee on Finance, with instructions, Reid amendment No. 531, of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 532 (to the instructions (amendment No. 531) of the motion to commit), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 533 (to amendment No. 532), of a perfecting nature.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let us be very clear that in terms of the deficit-reduction package that is being debated, we are talking about an issue of huge consequence not only for people today but for our kids and our grandchildren. This is likely, from a domestic perspective, the most important issue any Member of the Senate or the House will ever vote on in his or her political career. This is a huge deal which in many ways will shape the future of America.

I know the media refers to the discussion as whether we are going to have a big deal of \$4 trillion or whether we are going to have a smaller deal of \$2 trillion, but the real issue is whether we are going to have a fair deal—a deficit-reduction package that represents the interests of working people and the vast majority of our people or whether

we are going to have a deficit-reduction package that ends up reflecting the needs of the wealthiest people in this country, who are doing phenomenally well, and the largest corporations, which in many instances are making recordbreaking profits. That is really what the debate is about.

The Republican position on deficit reduction has been extremely clear and is consistent with their rightwing ideology. Despite the fact that our current deficit crisis has been caused by two wars—unpaid for—huge tax breaks that have gone to the wealthiest people in this country, and a recession caused by the deregulation of Wall Street and the lack of revenue coming in as a result of that recession, our Republican friends are adamant that while the richest people in this country are becoming much richer, while today we have the most unequal distribution of income and wealth of any major country, where the top 400 individuals own more wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans—that gap between the very rich and everybody else is growing wider—our Republican friends say the deficit must be balanced on the backs of working families, the elderly, the sick, and the children. No, the very rich, the top 1 percent, who now earn more income than the bottom 50 percent, should not be asked to contribute one penny more.

The Republicans are very clear, despite the fact that corporate profits are soaring, that corporation after corporation is enjoying huge tax loopholes that enable them to make billions of dollars a year in profits and not pay one penny in taxes. Republicans say: Sorry, off the table. Large, profitable corporations, with CEOs making millions a year, don't have to contribute to deficit reduction. Only the children have to contribute, the elderly have to contribute, and only working families, the unemployed, and the sick have to contribute to deficit reduction. We have to balance the budget on the backs of those people. But if you are very rich and getting richer, if you are a profitable corporation, that is off the table. You don't have to contribute a nickel.

Poll after poll shows that the Republican position and their ideology is way out of touch with what the American people need or want. This is not BERNIE SANDERS talking; this is the American people talking. In poll after poll, when the American people are asked, "What is your preferred option in terms of deficit reduction?" they say it is to ask the wealthy to pay more in taxes. So when our Republican friends say the American people don't want to raise taxes on the wealthy, that is just not true.

To my mind, what the Republicans are proposing is immoral in terms of coming down heavy on the most vulnerable people in our society, people who are already hurting as a result of the recession. When real unemployment is 15 percent, what do you want